A Handful of Frightened Doves

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“A Handful of Frightened Doves”

by

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31 October 2019

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Statement of Poetics

When the decision was made to pursue a thesis on poetic form, I was, at first, terrified to say the least. The questions came in a torrent: How could I add to a discussion as old as *ars poetica* itself? What is my part in the construction of form and poetic interpretation? What is form’s relation to the making of meaning? What is meaning’s relation to form? Where do word and form intersect in my mind? Would it be possible to make a new book of forms? What would that book look like? The more I read, the more overwhelmed I became. The more I began to dread how I might speak to the idea of poetic form, the longer my shadow grew. This fear threatened to consume me right up until the point that I did what always centers my poetic intent: I picked up my pencil, opened up my notebook, and began to write poetry. An essay on poetic form, by Frank Bidart, came to roost in my mind and I held fast to the ideas: “forms are the language of desire before desire has found its object [...] Forms seek subjects [...] *Form* is the magic circle [...] within which the poem can exist in the world” (5; 14-15).

What I eventually came to accept and understand, is that this thesis would be broad and sweeping—an experimentation of forms, gestures, and homages that help to identify my poetic lineage and further expand my own methodology of poetics. There are no overt answers or concise explanations relating to form and content in this thesis. What I have pursued is an externally experienced narrative of reading, based around the sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, architectures of poetic structure, filled to the brim with language. If the reader identifies repeated use of one particular form in the thesis, they are then forced to reinterpret content and material upon each subsequent visitation to this form—they are asked to reimagine the ways in which a repeated form can take shape. In this way, I attempt to challenge expectation in the physical representation of word and thought.

There are moments of internal rhyme schema and structure that entice the ear while challenging the eye. Other times, language itself has come bubbling up, and if Spanish called, I answered. Therefore I ask the reader to navigate new space when a foreign tongue is introduced to the straightforward advance of a couplet or a quatrain. Perhaps in this vein we can approach some aspects of form as “imitations of consciousness” (Corn 261). The poetic structure harbors and fosters the growth of language, and vice versa, language comes to stretch out and fill the space of any given form.
This thesis has also been written with the intent of reminding the reader of process as product—with the intent of showing the seams and stitches that make up a work. The consideration of form as process has allowed me to write with an urgency of projecting the reader “toward that point where [...] words cease to comment on any experience, but become an experience in and of themselves [...] full of all manner of things language wants to say” (Britton 20). I believe that the Index of Poetic Forms that I’ve compiled does well to speak to this process, as well as the forms that have provided a scaffold for my experience (soon to be lost) and my language (soon to be experienced).
Polonius: “Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t”
-William Shakespeare, Hamlet

“A rap of your finger on the drum fires all the sounds and starts a new harmony”
-Arthur Rimbaud, Illuminations
song (one)

lights up.
nest of barbed wire
center stage. two children,
boys aged eight, muck about nearby,
anxious.

deep roar
of lion heard
offstage. both boys grimace—
single smoke tendril rises from
barbed nest.

“look there,”
says boy pointing—
nest center molten and
flame now visible. faint singing
within.

“you hear
that don’t you?” asks
boy. neither meets gaze. “sun’s
setting too.” children edge closer
center.

one child
picks spider from
wire, chews half, hands off the
other. slow crawl into the fire.
blackout.
Ciphered Sestina

One night a fever struck me. My veins were nicked by aluminum, so that amid hot red rashes, I tasted only bedlam. I played as if Christ and used a single moment to delve into the depths of a bronze echo, hearing always the call of forte.

“Allegro forte,” translated to: wet light reflected against aluminum, the silver sheen transformed to echo protons and electrons as dancing bedlam—they shoot like meteors into your eyes, they delve into your heart hot, like Christ.

He cupped a butt low and lit it, Christ did. He pulled fire deep into the filter and cried “Forte!” Through clouds of blue smoke he signed a cross to delve past mystery and patted out a sheet of aluminum. He had a hankering for the tweak—for bedlam. He wanted all his open wounds to echo.

“Woe to you who becomes Echo,” mumbled Christ. “Yet blessed are those who wreak bedlam.” “Pull your sword from my ribs, to forte, then stop.” He coughed blood into a beer can (aluminum). He pushed your fingers into his chest. He asked you to further delve.

¡Venga! Yo recuerdo ahora que quería ahondar, nadar en realidad, por su eco ensangrentado. Cuando yo duermo, envuelvo el pecho con aluminio y espero que el fantasma, la flor ardiente se llame Jesucristo, cantará el cantar de los cantares, y me refleja forte mientras me levanto, corto el ajo y respiro el jaleo.

I guess now I’ve killed my fear of bedlam. And yet after a thousand histories lived, I’d delve no longer into your heart, nor my own, to draw forte, to scribble on stone with black cinders, to fill a cave full with your echo. You’d stand up with arms spread wide—wouldn’t you Christ? Can I call you that? Can I show you your reflection in a sheet of aluminum?

I recant. I see now the bedlam wrought by an intransigent echo. You are calling from a far shore for me to delve into Christ. I mouth forte across the water—paying out sound like faith tap dancing atop aluminum.
man remembered moving

timed air vibrates in the bubbles.
how would you feel forward on wings?

so large is this sun that he cannot sidestep
the dynastic. i know it. he knows it. the

bones beg it. further, or rather, an evening
backward. light outcast. a liquid. an animosity.

a sierran tar flanks collins predawn—unravels
ahead of me. so large is this symmetry that he

must roll his teeth into his sleeves to speak.
a sprint is played in reverse and fails to gain

ground. he must caress his weight to earn it.
his bid trembles. his bell large. sound violent.
“He’s just a boy.”

Entered into a tunnel dug by sound
the child fingers a hole forward
finds clods of charred moldings
split to tumble into miniature land
slides the earth a dry-heave of sleep
tucked beneath cloudy nails and a
trickle of gel blooded from
stone cracked wall, noticed, now,
by rolled eyes blue, alone,
edging into the soft embrace of
asphyxiated bellows.

If a child dies within
a tunnel dug by sound,
you can find me singing
underwater.

Where a child lives within
a tunnel dug by sound,
you find me blessed by singing
waters.

If a watered sound lives within the dirt,
I can become a land holding child.
If a tunnel can be captured, blessed singing,
I can taste a water held in-transit.
If you felt quinine digging out coded malaria,
I can give you thought spit crystals.
If they slather your torn heart in mustard,
I can find the flicker of a wet opening.
If the build of a scaffold (within the lung)
    is spray-painted black, nothing but black,
    I can hear my father waking up.

I can hear him whisper,
“Which one of you did this?”
Punching the Clock

If you bury the severed head of a deer, it takes roughly three years for the insects and grubs to mine away the meat and blood. Their mandibles chew up lank skin like a woodchipper—pierce gelatinous eyes—scrub wet flesh off the brainpan. Ants migrate through canyons in the jaw, while statues of owls keep watch. Empty skulls lack eyes, and as such, lose a sense of time. Marble owls never close their eyes, and so, they see through the mind. They see through the Earth by not blinking. Do. Not. Blink. Look here. Put these antlers on and run around, close to where your head was buried and sniff the ground. Do you feel like a deer? Does the decay bless your memories, or genitalia? Do you understand what’s happening within the bodies of your Mother and Father? Are you any less lonely? Sshhhhhh...Be quiet. There’s an owl watching.
entombed

i hiccuped blood in an empty theater, seated center stage
at grandma's card table. surrounded by sparrows
bathing in cinnamon, i began to weigh the color
of stage lights by hand. seated center stage

at grandma's card table you had skinned a memory clean
to fry, that i weighed by light in the colors of my hand.
we painted the wood underfoot with sunflower oil,
and you fried a clean memory of skin on the stained glass

of a camper shell—gilded with sunflowers and painted like wood.
if i cried, you answered in bright silence, camped up on a shore
awash in stained glass. she handed me a maraca filled with teeth.
my mouth gelded, we measured breaths in shadow, filled

my mirage with foxfire and hapless speech while the venomous
crowd gnawed on the door. a reflected silhouette welded
my eyes shut in shame. everything i borrowed has broken
back to them clean. while the venomous crowd gnawed on the stage doors,

sparrows bathed in cinnamon and the borrowed broke into
cards all around me. i hiccuped blood in the empty theater.
II.
song (two)

garbage
cat tip-toes on
dumpster's edge, hesitates
the dive into bone and sardine
barrage.

raccoon
waddle moonlight,
spills scents on concrete slabs—
surrounded by empty trash bins
rain falls.

sofa
cushion catches
cracked oriental lamp
where seeds of light and bloodied bugs
fasten.

bottles
resemble crushed
handfuls of sharpened sand—
effervescent remnants of beer
shouting.

thunder
tumbles over
itself in forgotten
cascades, chewed, softened, flattened to
repeat.
respect

remember when we were cornered by junkyard wolves and you shook
your wooden scissors about proclaiming their tooth snaps nothing but lures?
aural perils that only a schmuck would tout? you called them porcelain enemies
and laid down to sleep, so what could I do but admire their primal creep? your confidence
tasted like burnt styrofoam, and I recognized the squirrelly meteor of war had finally come home.
vagrancy

a porcupine’s violence languishes in the sun—quills
   aflame as peppered tips tremble to lick flesh.
   *

a porcupine’s violence loops through the cheek
   and spooks the ear from its roost (shattered lapis).
   *

a porcupine leans into methodical chants—a mimetic
   resistance to violent stutters of the tongue.
   *

a porcupine’s feet chew dirt and deliver refuse into
   the snout—banked coals shiver through a cracked funnel.
   *

a porcupine’s violence anchors nocturnal epiphanies
   clinging to placental ephemera that drip drip drip down tree bark.
   *

a porcupine violates inquisitive hungers wrought in threes
   by a pulsing black eye, marbled, tonally.
   *

a porcupine’s violence renders light split—
   come forward and pick these colorblind violets—
   come bleed the biome from your throat—
   come find violence overflowing from spilt frost—
   *
   now comes the needle.
   now burns the hay.
An Echo: Build-Destroy-Consum Thought

The imperative is just another example of force molded into the forms of aluminum bears and swans. Issue and receive commands using the same battery source feeding old sparky. Draw the reflection of sweat boiling on bare skin, beneath the bright duress of state sponsored heat lamps. We’re asking you to crawl, naked, on your hands and knees, through the streets and gutters. Scrape up every itinerant flash of coin and metal. Swallow spoiled pennies and corrosive dimes—prick and dissect your bloated tongue with pins and broken knives—superheat the mass within the smelting pot of your gut until smoke curls from out your belly button.

Congratulations. You’ve done it. You’ve managed to recycle the fluent mechanization of sociological hunger. Those tears you feel crawling across your cheek are only the result of escaping steam. The green you’re seeing is due to arsenic poisoning. Stop trying to look around. Keep crawling. You’re not full yet. We’ll tell you when you’re full.
bench

couch
made bare is all
ribs and
black steel

steel has
blackened
like ribs cupped
for seating

steel cups
fill themselves with
black ribs
and bare backs

as sunlight
cuts itself
through cold
wind

to be bare
as blind steel
shadowed in grass
and the clippings of clouds

where the body is held near to a shiver.
timing

a fresh taste of tar lengthens through
the afternoon now passed sixteen times
the weight of mangled alpacas.
spoiled wine is abundant and flowing—
soaks the scaffold of bones.
oil spills from remembered cheers
while the tongue lingers over a second hand.

the teeth rejoice in lustful fratricide.
the afternoon has now passed sixteen times.
the teeth rejoice in lustful fratricide.
the afternoon has now passed sixteen times.
the teeth rejoice in lustful fratricide.
the afternoon has now passed sixteen times.
your call for red wine is faint.

we refuse to line the lungs in tar
yet the afternoon promises a fresh thought
mangled in the fur of alpacas.
colonize these bones and siphon
off the silence in theatre.
your teeth cry smile and
we rejoice by filling the heart with mud.
III.
song (three)

Drug Facts:
We bring you an herbal tonic of need.
Rub, tickle, taste, but never a full throat.

Active Ingredients:
Buttermilk, permethrin, tabasco, whiskey, aloe leaf, duck fat.

Uses:
Helps prevent tooth cold, wasp thought, molded tongue rot, moon fever, loose bowels, foot scabies.

Warnings:
If swallowed call nearest radio post. Ask for syncopated syrup of rose.

Questions:
May be addressed to no specific voice. Sleep yields vision, and confusion draws light.
cuddle

to→bear→ice→glacier→pond→trout→teeth→
toes→boot→dirt→nail→barn→pebble→
powder→tongue→storm→eye→cord→
martini→breath→hornet→stair→sun→
chainlink→tortoise→machine→lead→foot→
dart→tingle→funnel→belt→ocean→yen→
tart→anonymity→coconut→dream→chocolate→
filter→nerve→shave→spit→sweat→
lung→stone→clock→filth→twine→

“we can’t fit any more mice into the bag, john, we just fucking can’t.”
the astronomy of becoming

constellations transphonemed into biological fingers
plug you into I.V. marrow laced gunpowder—
bursts dot osteoporotic blank space open wide—
your steel halo caresses a line of urine strung
from smoke filled blast sites. conch shell
bubbles up bucket of soaked cochlear implants—

song burst pupil. deep deep gash. lung winks, rib plucks,
penny spin sideway. the carotid splashes lucid codes
you pick apart through player-piano repetition.
a rite holy song of phoneticism, branch chain constellation
soft blooms neurons to populate chaos

between blank slate sky—
between soil dug trench—
between a gasp and a hiccup—

punished by a sense of recognition,
stars swallow air built to work
as gallows.
**Luck**

Luck is a bucket of pig's feet
   knifed out on a new moon,
   drizzled with battery acid,
   and crowned by failing light.

Luck was caught sleeping in the snow,
   half buried like a sick child,
   splayed & spotted with pox,
   breathing clouds of crystal.

Luck had found three severed fingers
   bound up in burlap and stowed
   away in an open closet—
   all three suggested inclusion of the mouth.

Luck sees through maudlin time-pieces
   and imparts a quizzical grin by
   climbing ivy and logic, but also
   by wearing word and sound like proof.
demands

confess yourself to me arabic.
    a mountain bolted to the sea
floor. find yourself moonstruck
    as a broken carrot. ghazal

or guzzle. the rogue grammar
    we lick from cursed wine
bags, hiccupped and traced
    through the lungs like

an invisible second hand
    indicates cracked
translation amidst
    furious song.

reply in bronze morse,
    codes that my eye and ear
will mold into thought—
    realize all form as survival.

confess me.
    confound
voice.
    pour
        more light.
Gargled Prayer

Ghost melt wax over rabbit smoke pale
   (fuma la leche, conejo, hirviendo rapido).
Ghost crown three feathers and a bronze medallion
   (la nube gris llama al pájaro perdido).
Ghost claim the bones around your neck
   (adivina quién está sonriendo allá, allá, aquí).
Ghost tear your eyes from me, I plead
   (¿te encontrarás mis ojos mientras el perro se acobarda?).

Lantern starved of light—
The wind makes a swift exit.

The longer I stare into the water
To find you, the angrier you become

   (¿si me ahogare, estudias las burbujas?
   ¿practicarás tu canción?
   prométeme fantasma.
   prométeme cualquier cosa).
IV.
**song (four)**

if snow
falls you enter
unwatched east parking lot
door at a time clock computer
always

night shift
starting at six
you migrate from cave to
cave bathed in fluorescent discharge
exchange

word for
the madness of
machined rhythms you fill
manual horrors into banal
mailing

sleeves chewed
by steel pincers
slobbering to repeat
their imperious repugnance
in time

with your
incapable
utterance of a full
‘i’ - cheap coins void language where you
exit.
cento in C minor

in the room upstairs you handed out to us
the sea and an edition standing for
what we may call a “reliable” landscape.

the window is opened and a bird flies through
good memory, its powerful master, implacable
the code consists in noticing

there is something inexplicably familiar about
these spots. they occur in an instant. the rules
are inside your head and truly refuse symmetry.

in the distance i scent the pith
and the sphere is swept away
somewhere. someone speaks spanish

on the stairway.
an echo shifts

crests of crescendos are calling,
their mouths overflow with legion upon legion of
syncopated fire ants, marching under glassy eyed
banners drawn to resemble your father
the first time you heard him cry,

the second time you caught his tide of sound
cradling not just intent, but gut feeling,

a gutted building blown out with soot and bone.

i’m everywhere scattered some remnant of lung and toenail—
all of it—
you’re everywhere, some secretly visceral braille, what you thought

you saw vomit in an alleyway on a saturday night. not unlike your sister
calling on a streetlight to wash away her stomach and melt every question of receipt.

* these crests are no longer fluid callings, as they crater and provide cover
to not just one wish, but the mass of bipedal mannequins
twitching in the desert, lying about seeing, and toasting to
visions of swift descents—a half split skull refuses
rhythms of linguistic toe tapping and this is due to this too is due
to a flushed stutter.

neither a tap nor a chop of cranial overflow
magnetizes word to trap image, and a sheet of ice
retreats brightly in response—

it isn’t that water braces its fear of light in silence,
or that rain plays the eye like dominoes in jest,

it’s only a dizzying height where you caught the shadow crying “I’m starved,”

like your mother cried
“I’m starved,” exactly like
your brother cried “I’m starved,” and you only found your hands full
of water and ether and all the echoes of your origins settled

into a blind march.
urgency

are you sure you just saw a ghost?
it’s this repetitive lurching that
woolen fingers tease into ginger.

i’m fighting this nagging insistence that
a new language won’t reveal itself with frenetic
clapping or facsimiles of rotten translation, scribbling

another dose of red, gold, blood, and lizards might do
it. if you’re still hungry what have i to do with
it? we identify expectations as a mass

of shaved and bloated sheep.

here is the method,
now go steal yourself a key.
You Found Me Running Backward

why wouldn’t you ever accept the future except
the future wouldn’t you ever want to rest in that
fought for air wouldn’t you see in me how I fight
the future air you wouldn’t recognize you wouldn’t mind
ever if you could see me ensconced by word you see that
you can accept this leaden air by future word you lean into
by way of why wouldn’t you lean into air ever want to see
in me to become you couldn’t recognize me nor you
nor me by fighting the sight of a wanting future
acceptance minded by air’s recognition of you
wouldn’t mind the want of a word
wouldn’t you just reveal the future.

I want to taste air.

I wouldn’t recognize the word.

Teach me to read the tongue’s braille.
backyards

three primes prep the lawnmower for lunch.
after gathering wind blown limbs, loose
plastic, & set dog shit, you picture
piles of upended cumulus—wet.

Lunch
Loosed
Pictures
Wet

bare feet are scolded, forsworn foolish,
slapped about as a taste of scripture.
grasshoppers grind away on concrete
paired off beneath a boy’s hungry threat.

Fools
Skipping
Concrete
Threats

luminous whirs spin & sharpened growls
unchain voice—parse an autumnal hunch.
the smell of photosynthesis torn
in thirds lures lungs to flood a mindset.

Growls
Hunches
Borne
Mindsets

faint outlines of ordered squares still punch
through the approach of gestured fixtures.

Punched
Fixated
v.
song (five)

river—
mississippi
bloat with myth and pest-icide, crown me in braided mocc-assins.

river—
amazon i
worshipped your heat in pho-tos, swallowed dizzying waters
like milk.

river—
skunk, lazy, sed-uces eagles to chase
fish, drop stones on kids dancing in
rapids.

river—
paraná christ-enst with winter the tongue
of a drunk convert, gums caked with
dark mud.

river—
lethe, where lime
green underbelly be-longs to toad whom i catch, cajole,
caress.
A Villain’s Knell

Hoist me higher into the light,
where I might see level
with that crucified form—

for the sand burns my feet
and the desert’s whisper, too disheveled,
floods over me as light.

Lead me toward that cradled skull,
sooted, incandescent, and unraveling
in torn strips of that crucified shadow—

letting blood, bathe a child at night,
whilst wolf licks thought in the reveled upheaval of hung moonlight.

Open your mouth to chant visions—
taunt the blind tongue to grovel
like song within that skewered ribcage.

Hammered steel buries itself
in the ear like happenstance—fermented thunder.
Hoist me higher into the light,
with that crucified form.
warring space

that caustic desert
that imperial wasteland

opened first as intent—
gilded in wet copper,
gathered as a sloped tongue—
breathed second in absentia—

burning despite an air
inundated in religious backdraft,
breathed second in absentia—

of whimper, furnace blown
no voice spent,
spilled bread through bars—

again to heat imagined.
no chain swung to crack,
passed along into this new gap of space—

baked now into the eye
handful of glassed sugar—
limited in turns of cyclic imagery by time—
dissolution of tension caught tasting—
a lure tears the heart a new mouth).
dog

anti-freeze.
brushfire.
axe-handle.
anti-freeze.
song.
moon.
frost.
anagrammatical

muse,
lacerate my name. plunge through
abbreviated divination and delight
the association of timed rhythm:

when a given applies to an icon,
or we seal a lean ‘i’,
eon after eon slays another known as dewey
(yelled solely for affective proximities).

my lineage relies upon the lewd and the lank
repetition of coleslaws, wan, sly,
dichotomous to a T and spoken
as disease loaned freely.

i yawn the iowa in me—
stomach the lease and lien
of the slow sled dragging my youth
through yew and leeward river banks.

blankets of poison oak and ivy
sew a yellow ode over
the skin of this lessor scion—
yin as law seals the scene.

you ween me on oleander
in a lion’s den built for dolls.
i say “yes, mother,” with fingers crossed
above a new slain cow (hearing still your cola yowl).

wide the neon ocean where you saw
sin in me. an ion you named
that i carry.
Process-Process-Process

I draw a line and the line becomes me.
My hand casts shadow and the shadow
becomes line.
Graphite pressed to paper as the graphite
becomes word.
Word placed on paper is an equation of becoming.
These equations steeped in the shadow of
the hand.
A hand sees word between the pressure laid
as graphite.
Pressured shadows align themselves to movement
drawn palms.
Fingered word plays at denying the eye a
clean hand.
Your voice isn’t the papered end point, nor is it
a spun thought.
Spinning thought peppers annotation, it is
movement sung.
If my hand becomes me, my eyes draw neon
down the line.
You draw a line and I become you.

There is a soft flutter
in which I remember
that I’m choking—

I’m choking on a handful of frightened doves.
Index of Poetic Forms

Owing to the question of form’s relation to content and meaning-making, I thought it might be helpful to provide an index of poetic forms that were used in the writing of this thesis, with short notes as to how I interpreted or adapted the form to meet my own demands. Form as I began to understand it, while definable and identifiable, acted like an “invitation to a stranger,” but an invitation that is “already making demands on this stranger,” or in this case, the reader (Flook 55). While form may become as familiar as an invitation, once the reader has accepted my chosen space and body, they must adapt and interact with language and content. Classic form description is pulled from Lewis Turco’s The New Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics.

ANAGRAM: “The anagram is a word or phrase made by transposing the letters of a name [...] popular in the seventeenth century and earlier, casting anagrams was a form of divining [...] a means of foretelling the future of a person or of extracting the essence of his or her life or personality” (Turco 94). My piece, “anagrammatical,” started with the idea of divining the essence of my own life and future by creating as many words as I could using my first, middle, and last name (i.e. Nicolas Dean Wesely). Once I had a list of words compiled, I called to the muses (literally within the piece) and started to fill in the narrative blanks and spaces, letting the quasi-anagrams carry me forward into a poetic space of storytelling. Not only did the newly anagram-ized words help tease out biographical detail, but the vowel repetitions taken from my name and used within the piece signal something of an aural internal cohesion to the reader.

BREF DOUBLE: “French. Syllabic. Thought to be an ancestor of the sonnet [...] is a quatorzain: any stanza or poem of fourteen lines other than a sonnet. [...] Lines can be of any single length. Fourteen lines arranged in three quatrain stanzas and a concluding couplet” (Turco 104). There are three rhymes in the poem, a, b, and c, but not every line rhymes. The a and b rhymes appear twice in the three quatrains, and the c rhyme concludes each of the three quatrains, while the a and b rhyme make their third appearance in the couplet. When approaching the drafting of this form, I also began to question how the physical act of producing words and sentences influences the creative concept, therefore I decided to use a typewriter during the first and second drafts, after which I transferred a combination of the two from paper to word processor. I also committed myself to a line length of nine syllables, and tacked on an Echo Verse at the end of each line.
CENTO: “A pastiche poem compiled from the works or notebooks of a dead poet” (Turco 113). While ruminating on concepts of memory trapped within poetic form, I started pulling lines from Barbara Guest’s *Forces of Imagination* and César Vallejo’s *Trilce* that concerned themselves with memory. I mixed the lines up as I saw fit, with an intent to write between the chosen lines, but once I had compiled the work into tercets, it felt like a completed work, and I decided to stick with what form and found lyric had provided me.

CINQUAN: “An American form. Syllabic or accentual-syllabic. Five lines long, the lines consist of two, four, six, eight, and two syllables, respectively. It is unrhymed, and a set form of the quintet” (Turco 116). By way of sonic comparison, when I began to read and write in the form of the cinquan, I constantly heard the word “chain,” making itself known, so that as I wrote each one, it seemed as if the “songs,” were chaining together the form of the compiled works. This idea of a chain led me to format the thesis into the five sections, each beginning with a cinquan. Likewise, each “song” is a literal chain of cinquans in their construction as well; five to a song. What I consider to be the most important aspect of the cinquan usage in this thesis, is the forms adaptability in encouraging the readers to recognize and rethink structure. Although the syllabic elements and line length of the cinquan become familiar to the reader, internal verbal structure shifts in a way that the reader “must become a creative and active participant in order to [continue] to appreciate the overall scheme” (Fulton 59).

ECHO VERSE: “Any verse form written so that the last few words or syllables, when repeated at the end of each line, form a response to the line [...] sometimes it is possible for the repeated words to be read as a separate poem that responds to the main poem as a whole, in addition to the individual lines” (Turco 141). I’ve added the Echo Verse to my production of the Bref Double, in which the last word of a line is repeated, but I took a few liberties in sometimes selecting words that ‘echo’ or sound similar to the end line.

PANTOUM: “A Malayan form. Accentual-syllabic. Lines can be of any single length in any particular meter [...] consists of an indefinite number of quatrains [in which] lines two and four of each stanza, *in their entirety*, are repetons—they become lines one and three of the following stanza and so on” (Turco 200). One can end a pantoum by writing a quatrain “whose repetons are lines one and three of the first stanza in reversed order,” or by writing a couplet of lines one and three of the first stanza in reversed order (Turco 200). My pantoum deviates from tradition in a few different
ways. As the pantoum began and moved from the set order of repetition, I began to lean toward reordering the words of each line to achieve a vague repetition that was close, but not exact, to that of the previous, for example, “on the stained glass of a camper shell—,” morphed to “camped up on a shore, awash in stained glass.” The repetition and sonic variation began to devolve further and further as the poem progressed, which I thought did well for the overall tone of the piece, but I found that revisiting the initial lines from the first stanza capped the poem splendidly. Additionally the poem was first written as six quatrains, but after speaking with my advisor, we decided to bury the pantoum’s form even further, embedding the ‘invisible’ repetition and variation into four quatrains and a final couplet. The lines urge the reader to constantly reconsider and reevaluate what they’ve just encountered, as if there’s a whisper in their ear they can’t place. I’ve also found myself in the silly habit of naming my set form pieces with names that sound vaguely like the form for which they’re modeled after, i.e. “entombed,” for a Pantoum, “A Villain’s Knell,” for a villanelle, and “respect,” for a rispetto. Forgive me.

PROSE POEM: “If a poem is not written in verse—in a metrical prosody—then it is written in prose” (Turco 203). The prose poem holds a very special place in my own self-identification of poetic sensibility. It has always provided me with the lyrical space to delve into static, sometimes inaccessibly dense language, that opens itself up in unexpected places to suddenly sing melody or nail down song. And although Turco’s definition is short, the history of the form and its possibilities are astounding.

RISPETTO: “An Italian form. [...] Any complete poem consisting of two rhyming quatrains, often rhyming *abab ccedd*” (Turco 214). After drafting two rhyming quatrains, I felt the same way about my rispetto as I did my pantoum, in that I wanted to somehow keep the constitutive elements, but bury the echo of it, so I went ahead and pressed the two quatrains together into a prose block that gradually lengthens. Although short, the rhyme scheme is still noticeable, and I feel the narrative quickly catches the reader.

SESTINA: “French [...] Thirty-nine lines divided into six sestets and one triplet, called the envoi. The poem is ordinarily unrhymed. Instead of rhymes, the six end-words of the lines in stanza one are picked up and re-used, in a particular order, as end-words in the remaining stanzas. In the envoi, which ends the poem, the six end-words are also picked up: one end-word is buried in each line, and one end-word finishes each line. The order in which the end-words are re-used is prescribed by a set
pattern lying in the numerological sequence 615243” (Turco 234-235). If the Sestina still feels unfamiliar, I highly suggest looking into the form online through the use of diagrams, as they tend to show the re-ordering of end words in subsequent stanzas, using the numbered sequence, in an enlightening manner. Many of the diagrams and descriptions of the Sestina rely on starting with end words labeled as ABCDEF, and as this was my first time writing one, I decided to choose end words that began with the letter to which they would be applied in the sequence, i.e. Aluminum, Bedlam, Christ, Delve, Echo, Forte. While adhering to the sestina’s rigorous structure, a narrative slowly snuck up behind me and the end-words directed my writing. The piece itself came together unusually quickly and felt nearly automatic.

VILLANELLE: “A French form. Lines can be of any single length. Nineteen lines divided into six stanzas—five triplets and one quatrain—turning on two rhymes and built on two refrains. The refrains consist of lines one (1) and three (3), complete. Line one (1) reappears as lines six (6), twelve (12), and eighteen (18); line three (3) reappears as lines nine (9), fifteen (15), and nineteen (19), finishing the poem” (Turco 254). Much like with my Pantoum, I continued to substitute sonic “approximations [or rearranged line sequences] for exact repetitions,” while the end of the poem dives back into the original structure requirements (Lehman 248).
Annotated Bibliography


I write to music often, and there are certain albums that spark and engage my writing in noticeable ways; this album is one of them. It’s a bit of a departure from his usual stuff, but here Brian Blade steps from behind the drumkit to sing and write on this haunting album. It’s full of reminisces of family and religion. This is an older album that my brother gifted to me a decade ago, and although I hadn’t listened to it for a while, a revisit flooded me with nostalgia and certain feelings for times long past. Front to back, listened to without stopping, it hits me hard.


Another atmospherically brilliant album by Mr. Blade, this time with his impeccable Fellowship Band. The title track “Landmarks,” “Ark.La.Tex,” “He Died Fighting,” “Friends Call Her Dot,” and “Farewell Bluebird,” are all standout tracks that drive me forward, whether I’m running, reading, or as has been the case recently, writing for this thesis.


*Eunoia* has truly been an amazing book to behold. It’s breadth and scope of intent is astounding and inspiring to me as a writer. The title’s definition as “beautiful thinking,” is reflected in the process that went into the poetic writing, as each vowel of the title takes up its own chapter and simultaneously populates the majority of each word used to create a prose block. I was constantly inspired by the linguistic word play, as well as Bök’s masterful ability to retain a narrative among surrealist and absurd forays into language.


Professor Carr’s poetic descriptions of Real Life Installations and the myriad interpretations in artistic form that made them real (sculpture, music, film, etc...) consistently reminded me of what was possible when a writer provides word to other styles of artistic processing.

Much like Bök’s *Eunoia*, Christensen’s *alphabet* was a master class in approaching form and process, this time through her handling of the abecedarian, with the numbers of lines of each piece written in accordance with Fibonacci’s mathematical sequence. There is a movement between form, structure, and the language that fills it, that never stopped teaching, nor lost it’s magic for me.


Every single one of the essays in this book is a transformative experience in considering poetry and form, and the quotes used throughout this thesis are largely drawn from them. What is even more beautiful about the book is that each essay is accompanied by the poetic work which it references, written by the selfsame author. I’ve owned this book for over a decade and I always find something new when I open it. In fact, it feels as if the writing of this thesis was circling around this book for a few years now, I just didn’t know it at first.


Another highly important venture into form, but this time centered around jazz and poetry. In Ben Goldberg’s words, the process was as such: “Being crazy about Dean [Young’s] poetry […] hatched the following: 1. I write a song based on one of Dean’s poems. 2. Get my band together and record the song. 3. Dean is in the studio. I don’t tell him which of his poems the song comes from but as he listens on headphones he writes a new poem based on what he hears. 3. So now we have a new poem which is like the old poem filtered through a song. 4. Repeat” (Goldberg pyroclasticrecords.com). What Goldberg says next felt akin to what I have attempted to do with form in this thesis: “In music these days it is a term of praise to say that someone ‘doesn’t give a _____.’ It’s hard to say exactly what it means, but it doesn’t mean they don’t care. More like they’ll try anything. That’s a feeling I often have with Dean’s poetry: he might do anything. And if you might do anything, this brings up the question of what can be
done, but you’ve kind of snuck up on it from behind or maybe it has snuck up on you” (Goldberg pyroclasticrecords.com; emphasis added). It’s important for me to always consider what can still be done. Strict forms have taught me that by adhering to pattern or rhyme, “the poem grows richer for being ‘stretched,’” it finds unexpected avenues by which it must pass, and usually, the writer is caught unawares (Waldrop 220).


I have always been inspired by the surrealist and the absurdist traditions, as well as the Language poets of the 1960s, to throw everything I possessed at language and poetry. I delight in confounding and challenging readers through aural and written images, but Gizzi reminded of the importance of narrative, the strength that a pronoun carries in grounding and guiding a reader, and a reinterpretation of what it means to be free with language. My table of contents page was also modeled after Gizzi’s in Artificial Heart.


Guest’s short, gorgeously written, and highly accessible book on writing is something I revisit a few times a year. The piece’s move from the realms of theory into the poetic seamlessly and “Invisible Architecture,” excerpted here, retains questions of poetics that never leave me: “There is an invisible architecture often supporting the surface of the poem, interrupting the progress of the poem. It / reaches / into the poem / in search of / an identity with the poem; / its object is to possess the poem for a brief time, even as an apparition appears. […] An architecture in the period before the poem finds an exact form and vocabulary—, / before the visible appearance of the poem on the page and the invisible approach to its composition. […] By whom or by what agency is the behavior of the poem suggested, by what invisible architecture, we ask, is the poem developed?” (18-19). I truly believe that there is a lifetime of poetic work ahead of me that may never reach an answer or conclusion to Guest’s questions.


A gorgeous take on the abecedarian, Mullen has consistently been a guiding light for me
when I consider taking risks with form and language. Like *Eunoia*, it is full of linguistic play that I oftentimes dream of.


As my thesis advisor reminded me at the beginning of this endeavor, we must always look back in order to understand the historical lineage in which we are participating with. Many of the authors studied in Perloff’s work have been seminal to the formation of my own poetics, but her handling of theory regarding style, form, and substance were nothing short of eye opening.


A rollicking foray into writing style and form. Queneau tackles the writing of the same scene on a bus in over 100 different styles. It is lighthearted, yet consistently challenged me regarding the rhetorical tools available in language, as well as larger questions of translatability.


I was initially reluctant to jump into Raworth’s work. It seemed too choppy, too propulsive, too shifty in image and vocalization, but as my advisor so wisely pointed out, this was exactly what I had been doing in my series of “songs” in the thesis. I swallowed my frustration and as I looked back into Raworth’s work, I realized much of my inspiration was following in the lineage he had set out before me.


Prior to the writing of this thesis I had never read Silliman, but as soon as I stepped into his work and began to understand the scope of his vision (a continuous work beginning in 1974
and ending in 2005) in writing, and the nearly infinite forms he was pursuing, I was hooked. Silliman has provided me with form I’ve never seen nor expected, and a melding of language that ranks with the best that history has to offer.


This book should be considered one of the lynchpins of this thesis. I think I’m most happy that it was handed to me without any pressure, in that my advisor consistently told me to play with language, open the book up at random, and never feel beholden to any form. I took his words literally, and although I deviated from certain forms in ways that I thought aided my own writing style, Turco’s book of forms handed me tools of every device to mold and adapt my language.


Like Gizzi’s grounding pronoun usage, Vallejo was a master at narrating a dream like state within an accessible poetic form and linguistic construction, which isn’t to say that Trilce isn’t challenging, which it most certainly is, but it challenges in the most beautiful ways imaginable. The book is also invaluable for its publishing of the Spanish on the verso side of the page, and the English on the recto. I have taken to heart a tercet at the end of poem LXXIII: “Absurdity, only you are pure. / Absurdity, only facing you does this ex-/ cess sweat golden pleasure” (Vallejo 195).


John Yau never ceases to amaze me. Borrowed Love Poems always delights in the pleasures of adapting language to form. Whether he’s tackling sestina after sestina, or long meandering forays into the prose poem, the language is always fresh, inventive, and fun. This book continually reminded me of the joy and happiness that can be found in playing and working with language.
Acknowledgements

I’d like to extend a heartfelt thank you to my advisor, Noah. Every reading suggestion and conversation he provided me opened as many doors as I could wish for. The work followed.

To my friends, for listening and supporting an endeavor not always fully understood.

And to A. For all that you are and do.